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COMMENT ON SOVIET NOTE OF 16 AUGUST REGARDING GERMANY

The Soviet note of 16 August reveals no basic change in the Kremlin's policy toward Germany, and appears to be principally aimed at the German electorate. It proposes to call a four power discussion on a German peace treaty within six months, with the participation of representatives of East and West Germany. While not advancing the Soviet position, the note follows the line that may have been expected in reply to the Western proposal of 15 July for a foreign ministers conference. It appears, then, that the 4 August Soviet reply was principally an effort to get the USSR on record as favoring a broad agenda conference for easing international tension, and the inclusion of Communist China in such a conference. With that disposed of, the USSR apparently is willing to address itself specifically to the German problem in a manner more designed to upset Chancellor Adenauer's chance for reelection in September.

As a basis for discussion, the Soviet Union re-submits its draft treaty of March 1952 which included provisions for the withdrawal of occupation troops, a guarantee that Germany not enter into any military alliances, territorial boundaries based on the Potsdam agreement, no limitation on the development of German trade or economy, and permission for Germany to have its own army.

Again the USSR does not compromise on the crucial issue of free all-German elections as a prior condition to peace treaty discussions. Rather, the establishment of a provisional German government is proposed as a second step, and the question of elections regarded as only one of the chief tasks of that government. The note attacks the Western proposal for free elections as an attempt to foist upon Germany "all sorts of foreign 'investigators'", and to treat Germany as "some sort of colony without rights". To avoid supervision of elections, the Kremlin proposes that measures be taken by the four powers for carrying out free all-German elections "with the exclusion of any pressure whatsoever on the part of foreign powers in the carrying out of these elections". Having originally agreed to a four power electoral commission in its April 1952 note on Germany, the Kremlin's latest proposal, while ostensibly proposing free elections, actually represents a backward step.

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The detailed proposal for a provisional all-German government undoubtedly is designed to appeal to German sentiment. In addition to preparing for free elections, this government would decide upon such questions as the representation of Germany in the preparation of a peace treaty and in international organizations, the inadmissibility of involvement of Germany in military alliances, the expansion of East-West German trade, the free movement of peoples and goods across zonal boundaries, and the development of economic and cultural ties between East and West Germany.

The USSR recognizes that the establishment of a provisional government may prove difficult, and to insure continued control of its zone, suggests that for a certain period of time the provisional government be established while retaining the governments of the German Democratic Republic and the German Federal Republic. The note's emphasis on the provisional government's role in establishing East-West German contacts, indicates Soviet anticipation of a divided Germany for an indefinite time.

As an additional gesture to the Germans, the Kremlin proposes the elimination of both reparation payments and German indebtedness for occupation costs. In both respects, however, the Soviet Government is vulnerable to Western arguments. The USSR has extracted exorbitant reparations in contrast to the West, and its proposal for a limitation of occupation costs displays a lack of faith in its coincident proposal for withdrawal of troops within one year of the conclusion of a peace treaty.

Possibly in an effort to bolster the Soviet position by giving the impression of its readiness to negotiate, Foreign Minister Molotov has already invited an East German delegation to Moscow to discuss "important questions dealing with the entire German problem".

In West Germany, the note will intensify speculation on the prospects for unity, and each warring political party will endeavor to use the note to support its election campaign propaganda. The note, however, will probably have little influence on swaying any sizeable group of voters to switch their support in the 6 September elections. Its chief effect will likely be to increase the necessity for an Allied reply prior to the elections -- a development which Chancellor Adenauer had hoped to avoid believing that any Allied terms for four power talks might weaken his position.

The Soviet proposal for the formation of a provisional All-German government, composed of representatives from the Federal

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Republic and the German Democratic Republic, was foreshadowed by a speech of Max Reimann, West German Communist Party chief, on 17 June in Bonn, and a formal resolution by the East German Council of Ministers on 15 July, advocating the same proposal. Reimann's speech received no acknowledgement whatever in Bonn, and the East German Council's resolution was officially ignored by both the Bonn coalition parties and the Social Democratic Party. Spokesmen for the government parties emphatically declared that the government could have no relations with Communist puppets, and the Social Democrats passed a party resolution in a similar vein.

For the West German populace, the touchstone of Soviet intentions on unification is a willingness to yield control of its zone and to grant truly free elections under international supervision, but the present note casts even greater doubts that the Soviet Union will accede to this.